

Listing of Claims

1 – 18. (Cancelled)

19. (Currently Amended) A gaming machine comprising:

a bill acceptor configured to receive ~~for receiving~~ bills tendered, the bill acceptor comprising a sensor configured to evaluate ~~for evaluating~~ each inserted received bill ~~after it has been inserted in the bill acceptor and to output~~ outputting a signal indicative of one of an acceptance and a rejection of the received ~~which is used by the gaming machine to determine whether to accept or reject that bill;~~

an annunciator having ~~represented by~~ an array of illuminating elements configured to be illuminated in first, second, and third illuminating patterns, the first illuminating pattern being different from the second illuminating pattern, the second illuminating pattern being different from the third illuminating pattern, and the first illuminating pattern being different from the third illuminating pattern; and

a controller ~~that maintains~~ having a first counter and a second counter, ~~the controller incrementing~~ configured to increment the first counter on each occurrence of an acceptance signal, that the gaming machine accepts a bill that has been inserted into the bill acceptor and to increment ~~incrementing~~ the second counter on each occurrence of a rejection signal that the gaming machine rejects a bill that has been inserted into the bill acceptor, the controller further computing configured to determine a bill acceptance rate using the first and second counters as inputs to the computation and to activate ~~activating~~ the annunciator when the computed bill acceptance rate falls below a predefined value, configured to sequentially energize ~~the controller causing one or more of the array of illuminating elements to be illuminated in a predetermined the first, second, and third patterns repetitively, thereby indicating a bill acceptance rate being above the value, pattern and to sequentially energize the array of illuminating elements in the first, second, third, and second patterns repetitively, thereby indicating a bill acceptance rate being below the value~~ implementing the annunciator through illumination of one or more of the

array of illuminating elements in a predetermined second pattern different from said first pattern, wherein said first and second patterns are illuminated according to a plurality of states associated with said bill acceptor, said controller controlling said plurality of states associated with said bill acceptor,

wherein an alert regarding a malfunctioning bill acceptor is generated so that a patron at said gaming machine is not disturbed in game play at the gaming machine, and wherein the bill acceptor continues to receive and evaluate each inserted bill according to the same criteria regardless of the value of the computed bill acceptance rate.

20. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the annunciator is arranged in an area of the bill acceptor that receives bills and is visible external of the gaming machine.

21. (Currently Amended) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when at least 10% of bills have been rejected at most about 90 percent.

22. (Currently Amended) The gaming machine of claim 21, wherein the predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when approximately 20% of the bills have been rejected at most about 80 percent.

23. (Currently Amended) The gaming machine of claim 22, wherein the predefined value is set to a value so that the annunciator is activated when approximately 30% of the bills have been rejected at most about 70 percent.

24. (Currently Amended) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the controller is further configured to determine ~~computes~~ an updated bill acceptance rate following each insertion of a bill into the bill acceptor and ~~performs one of activating, deactivating, leaving the annunciator activated, and leaving the annunciator deactivated dependent on a comparison of the updated bill acceptance rate with the predefined value.~~

25. (Previously Presented) The gaming machine of claim 24, wherein the gaming machine further comprises a network interface and wherein the controller is in communication with the network interface and communicates signals relating to the bill acceptance rate to the network interface for communication onto a network.

26. (Cancelled)

27. (Currently Amended) A method of operating a bill acceptor of a gaming machine, the gaming machine including an annunciator represented by an array of illuminating elements, the method comprising:

receiving a bill at the bill acceptor;

sensing at least one characteristic of ~~[[each]]~~ the received bill ~~inserted into the bill acceptor;~~

generating one of an acceptance signal and a rejection signal using the at least one sensed characteristic ~~as a basis for a decision as to whether to accept or reject the inserted bill;~~

incrementing a respective one of an acceptance counter and a rejection counter based on the respective acceptance and rejection signals.

~~maintaining separate counters of the number of bill rejections and bill acceptances;~~

determining monitoring a bill acceptance rate of the bill acceptor based on respective cumulated values of the acceptance and rejection counters, the bill acceptance rate being computed depending on the cumulative value of both of the counters and updated following each bill insertion;

automatically, repetitively, and sequentially activating, when the bill acceptance rate is above a threshold, a plurality of illuminating elements in first, second, and third patterns, the first illuminating pattern being different from the second illuminating pattern, the second illuminating pattern being different from the third illuminating pattern, and the first illuminating pattern being different from the third illuminating pattern; and

automatically, repetitively, and sequentially activating, an annunciator a visual indicator located in a bill receiving zone of the bill acceptor when the bill acceptance rate over the plurality of bill insertions drops below the a predetermined threshold, the plurality of illuminating elements in first, second, third, and second patterns; the annunciator implemented through illumination of one or more of the array of illuminating elements in a predetermined second pattern following a predetermined first pattern of illumination wherein the first and second patterns are illuminated according to a plurality of states associated with the bill acceptor;

continuing to sense the at least one characteristic of bills inserted into the bill acceptor;
and

continuing to operate the activator for the duration that the bill acceptance rate is below the predetermined threshold so that a patron at the gaming machine is not disturbed in game play at the gaming machine; and

continuing to receive and sense each inserted bill according to the same criteria regardless of the value of the monitored bill acceptance rate.

28. (Cancelled)

29. (Cancelled)

30. (New) The gaming machine of claim 19, wherein the first, second, and third illuminating patterns are configured to create an impression feeding towards the bill acceptor.

31. (New) The method of claim 27, wherein the first, second, and third illuminating patterns are configured to create an impression feeding towards the bill acceptor.